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RUEFHLC/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 001767

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2017  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KHLS](#) [KJUS](#) [GM](#)  
SUBJECT: TERRORISM ARRESTS DEMONSTRATE THREAT OF HOMEGROWN  
ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

REF: A. BERLIN 1681

[1](#)B. BERLIN 1398

[1](#)C. MUNICH 218

Classified By: DCM John M. Koenig for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The September 4 arrests of three terrorist suspects, two of whom are German citizens who converted to Islam, has given Germany its first high-profile case of homegrown Islamic terrorism and focused attention on the southern German area of Ulm/Neu-Ulm, which authorities have long identified as a hotbed of radical Islam. The arrests of Gelowicz and Schneider, both ethnic Germans and life-long residents of Germany, have changed public perceptions concerning the threat of Islamic extremism in Germany and raised questions within political circles as to what potential measures should be taken to more closely monitor extremists. Furthermore, the news that the three suspects received instructions from Pakistan-based Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) leadership has generated a new awareness and recognition of the need to increase surveillance capabilities as well as enhance cooperation with international partners. The Interior and Justice Ministries are preparing legislation to strengthen the capabilities of prosecutors and increase the investigative powers of security officials to counter the homegrown terrorist threat. End Summary

#### Germany's First Homegrown Islamic Terrorists

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[1](#)2. (U) The September 4 arrests of three suspects planning large-scale attacks in Germany has sent shockwaves through Germany, given that two of the alleged terrorists, Fritz Gelowicz and Daniel Martin Schneider, were German citizens with non-immigrant backgrounds who converted to Islam as teenagers (Ref A). Previous terrorist cases over recent history have typically involved individuals with immigrant backgrounds and/or dual nationalities who were generally raised as Muslims from birth. Although there has been at least one previous instance in which a German convert has taken up arms in the cause of Islam (e.g., Thomas "Hamza" Fischer who died fighting in Chechnya in 2003), the current case is the first in which such converts were planning their attacks on German soil against German (and U.S.) targets.

[1](#)3. (U) Media coverage and editorials immediately following the arrests have expressed shock at how Gelowicz and Schneider, who had been raised in unremarkable typical German

circumstances, managed to adopt an Islamic extremist ideology and plan violence against their fellow citizens. There has been much hand-wringing and anxious speculation on how many other potential homegrown terrorists in Germany might be planning similar attacks. A poll (by the national polling firm Emnid) taken shortly following the arrests indicated that 85 percent of the public believe the threat of terrorist attacks in Germany has increased. This same poll showed that 56 percent of the public believe a strengthening of security legislation is the best response to the new threat.

¶4. (U) As the arrests have highlighted the homegrown terrorist threat, there have been calls for government monitoring of German converts to Islam, who number in the thousands each year. Though not likely to see the legislative light of day (see Septel), this proposal is a reaction to the perception that converts often tend to be more zealous believers in their new faith compared to those born into the religion. Minister Schaeuble, who leads the Federal government's "German Islam Conference" initiative, which attempts to promote an intercultural dialogue with the Muslim community, commented that "One thing is certain: fighting the abuse of Islam and exaggerated fundamentalism is, above all, a task for the Muslims themselves."

#### Ulm/Neu-Ulm - Centers of Radicalization

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¶5. (U) The Federal Prosecutors Office has identified a number of German cities as centers of Islamic associations and potential sites for extremism, including Ulm, Neu-Ulm, Braunschweig, Cologne, Berlin and Muenster. Of these, the neighboring cities of Ulm and Neu-Ulm have figured the most

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prominently over the past decade as breeding grounds for Islamic extremists. Ulm, a mid-sized city (population 120,000) in Germany's relatively conservative southern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, is a leading center for scientific research and birthplace of Albert Einstein. Ulm was rated as Germany's most healthy city by the health-oriented magazine "Healthy Living" in a nationwide survey last month. Neu-Ulm (population 51,000) is located on the eastern side of the Danube river in Bavaria.

¶6. (U) The cities received an influx of Muslim refugees from Bosnia in the mid 1990s, adding to their existing Muslim communities which came mainly from Turkey. Despite their traditionally moderate take on Islam, Bosnian Muslims developed ties with international extremists who were often viewed as the first to respond in Bosnia's hour of need. During the 1990s, the region was seen as a staging point for Muslim extremist fighters going to Bosnia. More recently, Ulm and Neu-Ulm have both hosted organizations that have played central roles in Germany's radical Islamist spheres.

¶7. (C) The Multicultural House (MCH) in Neu-Ulm was founded in 1996 and in the nine years that it was open attracted a series of noteworthy individuals and Islamic extremists including:

-- Mahmoud Salim, Osama Bin Laden's chief of financial operations who visited in September 1998.

-- Reda Seyam, alleged to be one of the planners of the Bali attacks of 12 October 2002.

-- Dr. Yehia Yousif, an Egyptian who first came to Germany in 1988 as a researcher but later became a jihad recruiter and hate preacher who took on a leading role at the MCH. Yousif left Germany in 2002 as investigations of his activities increased. Yousif's oldest son, who is alleged to have spent time in a Pakistan terrorist training camp, was deported after investigators found bomb-making instruction manuals in his apartment.

-- Khaled al-Masri was a visitor to the MCH.

-- Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 terrorist pilots, is reported to have visited the MCH.

-- Fritz Gelowicz is reported to have been a frequent visitor of the MCH.

¶18. (C) Following prolonged observation and investigation, Bavarian officials finally closed the MCH on 28 December 2005 and banned it on grounds that it promoted activities hostile to the constitution. Bavarian authorities indicate that MCH members had used the facility as a recruiting station for global jihad and distribution source of extremist literature. The ban was subsequently confirmed by the courts in January 2007 (Ref C).

¶19. (C) The Islamic Information Center (IIC), founded in 1999 and located in Ulm, has developed into a center of extremist activity particularly following the closure of the MCH. Given its location in a different federal state, Baden-Wuerttemberg security officials monitoring the IIC have needed to overcome coordination issues with their counterparts in Bavaria to ensure that extremists cannot escape observations by merely crossing the Danube river. Baden-Wuerttemberg authorities have listed the IIC as an extremist center since 2003. Fritz Gelowicz is reported to have joined the center in 2005 under the name Abdullah after following an introduction by his co-worker Tolga Duerbin.

¶10. (C) Authorities searched the IIC in conjunction with the September 4 arrests and hope that materials collected will enable them to close the center. Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister of Interior Heribert Rech commented that he is confident that these materials will be sufficient to close the IIC permanently. Ulm's mayor has also expressed the desire to close the center.

#### Links to International Networks

¶11. (C) All three of the terrorist suspects arrested

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September 4 are believed to have trained in Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) camps in Pakistan, and shortly following the arrests IJU leadership issued a statement confirming that the three had indeed been operating under IJU direction. The confirmation of this connection between an overseas terrorist organization and the Germany-based suspects demonstrates that the terrorist threat to Germany had reached a new level. Previous Islamic terrorism cases in Germany have not reached this level of sophistication and organization.

¶12. (C) The arrests in Pakistan and subsequent deportations back to Germany of multiple German citizens, or those with German residency permission, in the past few months has proven just how potentially widespread the links are between Germany-based Islamic extremists and overseas terrorist leadership. Some of these individuals, such as Tolga Duerbin, have been arrested on their return to Germany while others, such as Aleem Nasir and Nihad C., have been permitted to remain free. In any case terrorist training camp returnees are cause for concern among security officials.

#### Government Responses

¶13. (U) In a September 16 interview Minister Schaeuble summed up how the arrests had changed the political debate, saying: "We now know better than before that we are very much in the focus of Islamist terrorists." Since the arrests, Schaeuble has increased his calls for quick cabinet agreement on a number of legislative proposals to enhance the powers of the Federal Criminal Police (BKA) in counterterrorism investigations, as well as to permit the surveillance of the

computers of terrorism suspects (Ref B). This proposal for on-line computer investigations has been particularly controversial due to privacy concerns but Schaeuble has remained adamant, stating "We will not submit a BKA bill without including the option of on-line searches."

¶14. (U) Separately, the Justice Ministry has drafted a proposal that would significantly increase prosecutorial powers aimed at those who train in foreign terrorist camps as well as permit authorities to take earlier action against those in the planning stages of a terrorist attack (see Septel for analysis).

¶15. (U) This cable has been coordinated and developed jointly with Consulates General Munich and Frankfurt.  
TIMKEN JR